

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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A Look At The Sport of Kings

By - Paul MacArthur

"Ten years ago, even five years ago, I didn't think this would have been possible. I think, through the understanding and the respect that we have come to have for each other, me being a wrestler and you being the fans, it's opened a new avenue for me and enlightened me as to just how many people there are in the world that really, really love and respect the sport of professional wrestling. I'm real serious when I say that. I didn't think I'd ever find myself in a situation like this and it wasn't because I didn't respect you, I didn't respect your opinions. It was just because I felt that our sport - and it is a sport - deserved the maximum amount of protection and I still feel that way. But, after spending the weekend with you here and being around some of the people, whose names I don't have to mention, that I've come to respect, so let me just say I've had a great time and I look forward to seeing you all in the future. As far as Ric Flair's future, I'll be a world heavyweight champion again. A story a lot of you don't know is I threw John (Azzie) out of the Philadelphia Civic Center a couple of years ago. Not literally; not threw him out of the building. But, I was so stressed out over the fact that there were so many people backstage. I felt like we were losing our identity and there again, we've become good friends. I have a lot of respect for John. Thanks for having me. I've had a great time. One more thing, on behalf of that robe, some of the finest looking women in the world have had that robe on. Whooo!"

- Ric Flair, August 25, 1991 at the Second Annual Weekend of Champions

Sounding more like a general headed off to war than the wrestler of the 80s, Ric Flair proved, once again, why he is one of wrestling's great orators as he synopsisized two important issues in professional wrestling, in less than five minutes. Flair's entrance and performance in the WWF will deservedly receive a great deal of coverage in this and many other newsletters. At a time when there are so many problems in this great sport, his appearance in the WWF has sparked renewed interest for many. Speculation and anticipation are but two ingredients that will make his tenure in the WWF enjoyable. But most of all, Flair will be Flair, and that will make his WWF stay worth watching, even if you have to endure the WWF's lesser angles and matches. Will Ric Flair be World Champion again? I believe he will.

More important than the assurance of what he will do in the WWF, was Flair's address to the fans. He provided the opportunity to see the mutual respect that exists between himself and the fans. If for only a few minutes, he lifted the boundaries between himself and the fans to express genuine, positive emotion towards the people who admire and respect him. Flair's speech made many feel accepted. Perhaps that was the greatest reward of the weekend; hearing Flair acknowledge those who had so long lauded his performance, as friends. To call the moment memorable would be euphemistic.

The coverage of pro wrestling has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. The success of *The Wrestling Observer Newsletter* and *Pro Wrestling Torch* has proven there is an audience for straight, forward reporting on, and discussion about, professional wrestling. There are intelligent wrestling fans, who demand to be treated with nothing less than respect. But, as much as the hardcore, underground coverage of this sport has changed, in the larger picture, much remains the same. With the exception of Dave Meltzer's column in the defunct *National Sports Daily* and some columnists in a few papers around the country, professional wrestling rarely receives mainstream media coverage unless there is scandal or a crossover star does something special. The mainstream media still regards professional wrestling as a joke and isn't shy about treating it that way. Recent articles in *Sports Illustrated*, *Variety* and the *L.A. Times* only confirm that fact. In the mainstream media, wrestling is still a sport for social deviants, no matter how sanitized the product may look at times. For their purposes, it is something to be used as filler and little more.

Partially because of the lack of mainstream coverage, our demands for information have sometimes become rabid. For so long there were so few sources of information, that we would go to extreme measures to uncover anything. Or we just accepted that we didn't know what was going on, but really wanted to find out. The problem is, at times, our insatiable quest for knowledge, no matter how relevant to the sport, caused us to invade the privacy of many; sometimes of individuals we hold in high regard. If this has caused resentment at times, how can we not find that justified? While all athletes and entertainers give up a certain level of privacy and personal time when they enter the public eye, at what point is the line crossed? Does anyone in the public eye really have the right to expect privacy when they are in public? Isn't that part of the tradeoff for being famous? But, are they not human beings who, occasionally, need time to themselves, if just to have dinner in a restaurant?

These questions, and many others about the right to privacy versus being in the public eye, transcend the sport of professional wrestling. But, they have become more applicable to our sport as the journalism, if only from the underground, has changed. What was once a closed sport has opened in many ways. Changes in attitudes from the promoter to the wrestler to the fan have brought this about to some degree. To another degree, it was simply the fact that in the information age, a sport like professional wrestling really couldn't remain closed. The concept of a closed sport was another casualty of mass communications' evolution. While professional wrestling may have more protection than many other sports, partially because of the mainstream media's apathy, it will continue to become more open. Those that adapt will flourish. Those that do not will perish. Call it survival of the fittest or market adaptation, the fact is pro wrestling will never revert to the closed society it once was.

If we accept this premise, we must accept increased responsibility. For the promoters, it requires honesty about many issues they would rather avoid. For us, it requires deep analysis about our role in the world of professional wrestling. There are really two roles newsletter writers can assume: the reporter and the commentator. These roles can often become blurred, particularly when the reporter has a strong opinion on the subject. That is not uncommon. Rarely is a reporter completely objective. We all have our own frame of reference that influences our perceptions of various concepts and relationships. This is not to insinuate reporters purposely push their own agenda under the premise of reporting. Few do. Fewer succeed. Rather, we must accept the fact that we all have our own opinions that influence how we report. Thus, while trying to report, we may, while analyzing the issue, cross over into the role of the commentator. As long as we recognize this fact, the problems will be few. The role of the commentator is completely different from that of the reporter. As analysts and commentators, our perceptions and opinions are valued. They serve as the springboard for debate. Or, perhaps, penultimate commentary on a subject. Yet, they in no way lessen our responsibility to be accurate and informed. Perhaps what makes the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* so valuable is the combination role

Meltzer plays as reporter and analyst, while rarely obscuring the two. As media coverage for professional wrestling becomes more intense, so will the responsibility of those in the wrestling media. Those who fail to accept this, will also fail to adapt with the changes. Thus, they fail through the ramifications of their own inaccuracies, be they legally or marketplace based.

While we advocate the wrestling media accept increased responsibility, as Steve Beverly did in his excellent series of articles in *Matwatch*, this does not preclude continual hard edged reporting and acidic commentary. To suggest that, because our opinions may upset some, we should become obsequious writers who innocuously report and avoid controversy is nothing short of offensive. For those who choose that role, that may be their calling. But, for the underground media - which will one day become above ground - merely reiterating the thoughts of promoters does little more than perpetuate deforestation. Our role, as reporters and commentators, is to provide alternative news and opinions. If we cannot provide that, then we will most assuredly fail.

Most important, we must all remember the basic fact that makes us read, write and talk about wrestling so much: we love professional wrestling. We love the sport for the joy, the intrigue, the excitement, the friends, the laughs and even the frustrations it has brought us over the years. When we started this newsletter over a year and a half ago, we said it was because we were fans. We still are. We are fans because we love this sport for what it has given us. Perhaps, in some small way we are able to give something back. Writing this newsletter has been a learning experience. We sometimes wrote things that provoked hostility. But, the fact remained, we loved the sport. We have come to realize that our opinions, though not always agreed with, are at the very least respected. Thus, the mutual respect Flair spoke of became more solidified. The purpose of a newsletter is for the editors to provide something to this great sport. For all our critiques and unfavorable analysis, it is important we never lose sight of the fact that the reason we voice our opinions so vehemently and vociferously is because we love this sport and want nothing more than its continued success. For if professional wrestling fails, then we all lose as well. Perhaps the fans, the wrestlers and the promoters are slowly learning that if we differ, it is not out of disrespect, but out of caring enough to disagree. If we were apathetic, then there would be no debate, no viewpoints to share and less chance for success.

Professional wrestling has given us much enjoyment over the years. There really isn't a way we can put a price tag on what we have received. It's difficult to put a price tag on friendships and fun. To Ric Flair, we thank you for bringing us one step closer. To professional wrestling, we thank you for everything you have given us.

Sidelines

Thanks To Rodney Leighton, Jeff Cohen and Evan Ginzburg for their kind plugs. We really appreciate their, and your, continued support of this publication.

We've Skipped A Month • Yes, the summer months provided little to write about the sport we all love. Paul got a new job, attended six weddings and tried to maintain a social life. Dave spent the summer meditating with the Maharesi in India and didn't write much either. Rather than attempt to play catchup throughout the Fall, we've skipped our August issue. All expiration dates have been pushed one month forward so you will still receive the same number of issues. In the future, should various circumstances necessitate skipping a month, we will inform you in advance, like Jeff Mullins does with *Pro Wrestling Sushi*. Thanks Jeff.

Letters To The Editors • How about those Letters To The Editors, folks. The reality of the situation is, if you don't write them, we can't publish them. So prevent the Letters To The Editors section from being a barren wasteland, send us your opinions today.

It's Not A Bird, It's Not A Bee, it's the Wrestling Perspective Submission Manual. The perfect guide for anyone who wishes to submit an article for publication to Wrestling Perspective. Simply drop us a note and we'll send you a copy. It's as simple as that.

Wrestling Then & Now is a fine nostalgia bulletin published by Evan Ginzburg, whom we had the pleasure of sharing a table with at the Second Annual Weekend of Champions. Every month, Evan packs his issues full of memories from wrestling's glory days and fun commentary about life, music and just things in general. Wrestling Then & Now is available for \$1.25 per issue from Evan Ginzburg at PO Box 471, Oakland Gardens Station, Flushing, New York, 11364.

Don't Miss Our Next Issue as we'll have another fascinating interview, analysis on Sid Vicious' role in the WWF and more.

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Given The Chance, Lex Luger Can Be The Total Package

By - David Skolnick

Lex Luger's ascension to the WCW throne was not a pretty one. Filled with controversy and politics, it was seen as WCW's darkest hour. But the criticism that has befallen Luger since he defeated Barry Windham for the title on July 14, 1991 has been way off the mark. What is probably anger by hardcore fans directed at WCW for the handling of Ric Flair, is being vented out on Luger, who is largely responsible for any success the company has right now.

I've heard people say the character Luger is currently portraying is pretty close to his real personality. I never heard this prior to Flair's departure. It seems as though the wrestling media and hardcore fans, who only a year ago were singing Luger's praises by voting him the Most Improved Wrestler in the 1989 *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* poll, have turned against him the same way they abandoned Sting when he was injured last year.

Prior to his patella tendon injury, many thought Sting was going to be the biggest star in the business. However, hardcore fans quickly grew tired of him during his recovery. I admit I didn't enjoy Sting immediately prior to his Great American Bash victory over Flair and noticed his ring work was not the same. But perhaps we all forgot the actual severity of his injury. Still, the comparison of Luger to Sting is not valid. Luger has improved tremendously since he started in Florida and has become WCW's most valuable commodity. He is not the same wrestler he was when he started in the business five years

ago. Unlike other wrestlers who were pushed solely on their body, Luger took the time to learn his craft and has become a solid wrestler.

Part of the resentment towards Luger stems from the recent steroid controversy. Many feel that putting the World Championship around the waist of a wrestler with a bodybuilder physique is not the direction the company should be taking. But it's Luger's talent and desire that have made him world champion. During the past year, Luger has received a reputation for being somewhat lazy in the ring. At times, that has been true. But his current ring work is not being fairly judged. It is similar to saying that the Junkyard Dog or the Iron Sheik will always be in a bad match and that Flair will always have a great bout. We go into those matches with preconceived notions and don't fairly judge the match for what it is. I know it seems impossible, but the Dog and the Sheik have had, on rare occasions, good matches.

Is Luger a better worker than Flair? No. Is he the best worker WCW has? No. But a marketable wrestling champion needs to be more than a great worker. If that wasn't the case, Brad Armstrong, Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton would be fighting it out for the World Championship. It is cliché, but Luger is the total package. He is a very good worker, can do a great interview, has strength, endurance and charisma. He is also one of the best heels in the sport. Since his turn, he has only gotten better. What more could you want from your World Champion? But for some, it's Flair or nobody. Even if Flair did the job for Luger before his dismissal, not many of his current detractors would be singing a different tune. Like I said, for some, it's Flair or nobody.

With Luger as World Champion, WCW can do a lot. Luger's matchups with Windham and Ron Simmons are exciting and more importantly, they are fresh. Windham hasn't been in the main event for years and Simmons has never had a series of matches with the World Champion. It's obvious WCW isn't going to be a successful promotion for a long time due to a combination of their own mistakes and the current wrestling economy, but at least they aren't presenting stale matchups. Besides Windham and Simmons, Luger can face Eaton, Dustin Rhodes, Brian Pillman and, eventually, Sting. It's unfortunate that some hardcores are never going to like Luger. But Flair is no longer with WCW and even if he was, he was so misused, he meant very little. Luger has what it takes to be the wrestler of the 1990s. Now he has the chance.

Charity Begins at Home

By - Nannette McCormick

There has been a lot of controversy lately regarding the use of steroids among professional athletes. Wrestling fans have especially been interested because they are genuinely concerned about the health of the performers in the ring. We have been sickened by the story of Billy Graham, who is crippled by osteoporosis, while frightened by tales of others who have experienced uncontrollable mood swings, irregular heart beats, tumors and the like.

I had my own questions about the topic as a woman. I know that taking steroids involves ingesting synthetic or natural hormones. In the case of males, androgen and testosterone. I began to realize that I, along with millions of other women, am essentially doing the same thing when I take birth control pills (in the hormone, estrogen). Yet, this method of contraception is considered relatively innocuous by general society. The same people who worry about steroid abusers, don't think twice about their wives or girlfriends.

Compare the side effects of birth control pills with those of steroids. According to the packaged information from the pharmacy, I could be at risk for developing blood clots, having a stroke or heart attack, developing gall bladder disease, liver tumors or cancer of the reproductive organs. Lesser side effects include depression, nervousness, fluid retention, dizziness, nausea and vomiting. Sound familiar? It's what we've been hearing all along about steroids, yet there has hardly been a public outcry regarding birth control pills. It is a running joke that women experience violent mood swings. But what of the male athlete who experiences "roid rage?"

Women, like wrestlers, tend to ignore the dangers of taking hormones. We rationalize that not everyone develops the dangerous side effects and we learn to live with the minor ones. We, like wrestlers, develop a false sense of security. We believe that bad things always happen to someone else.

The next time you feel like pointing the finger at a wrestler who is a steroid user or even worry about him, think. You may have someone at home taking the same risks. Our motivations may be different, but the danger is the same.

An Interview With Angelo Poffo

To today's wrestling fans, Angelo Poffo is best known as the father of Randy Savage and Lanny Poffo. But, Poffo had a long successful career dating back to 1949 when he broke into the business. In this interview with David Skolnick on August 25, 1991, Poffo discusses his career, as well as his two sons and the differences between wrestling in the 1950s and today.

Wrestling Perspective: Let's start with your career. You were a big star in the 1950s and 60s.

Angelo Poffo: I started wrestling in 1949 and wrestled for quite a long time.

WP: Where did you wrestle?

AP: I started wrestling in the Chicago area when they had the Dumont Network. It was at the Marigold Arena with Jack Brickhouse. It went nationwide. Then onto Columbus, Ohio, then into Pennsylvania and Indianapolis, Cincinnati and then to the Southwest. Then I went to California, the Northwest. I've been all over Canada, Japan, everywhere.

WP: What's Japan like?

AP: Japan - there's a lot of people there. Very polite. When you don't know the language, you're stuck.

WP: What difference do you see between today's wrestlers and those in the 50s?

AP: They're better today. Just like in baseball and football. They got better. They got bigger. They got faster. Everything improves just like in baseball. I follow baseball quite a bit. It's better than it used to be.

WP: Advances in training, better technology?

AP: Sure, better training. During my time when I was wrestling, they said, "Don't touch the weights." They did it in baseball, they did it in football, they did it in wrestling. Don't

touch the weights. Now everyone is lifting weights. In fact, they're going further than that.

WP: Your sons are both in great physical condition.

AP: They work out all the time.

WP: When they were growing up and seeing what their dad did for a living, did they always want to do this?

AP: I had a very lucrative career as far as finances are concerned. They enjoyed it. They were participants in it and they are both athletically inclined. Both my wife and I were physical education teachers. They were interested in athletics. Randy was very interested in baseball. He spent 4 1/2 years in the minor leagues. The Cardinals signed him and then right out of high school, Lanny and I went back into wrestling as a father and son team. I wanted to get him started in wrestling. They didn't need any pushing. They were very interested in doing it.

WP: I find them both talented, but very different. They're both good aerial wrestlers, but Lanny is more gymnastically inclined where Randy is aerial and can mix it up with strength. When people talk about today's wrestlers, Randy's been around as a big star for six, seven years and he's still considered one of the best workers in the business. How dedicated was he to wrestling as a kid?

AP: He took everything seriously and worked hard. So did Lanny. Neither one of them were lazy. They worked very hard. When Randy was in baseball, I don't know how many swings he took at the batting cage. I had a batting cage and a pitching machine and he worked very hard. Lanny did the same thing and they're both very successful. They started in the ICW when I was a promoter. I promoted in the southern part of the country.

WP: It was an outlaw promotion against (Jerry) Jarrett?

AP: Yes it was. It went all right, except when you're fighting a company that's already in, it isn't as lucrative. There's nothing as lucrative as the WWF. The World Wrestling Federation actually changed their lives as stars. It made them both rich.

WP: I first caught them down in Memphis and you were managing them. What is Lanny doing right now?

AP: Lanny's coming back to the WWF. He and Hennig drew a lot of money.

WP: How did Lanny get into poetry?

AP: When he went to school, he was in honors English. It was something he was very interested in. It's something I can't do or my wife can't do. I don't know where the genetic link is, but he can come up with a poem right off the top of his head. It's just something he can do. It's very natural.

WP: I wasn't around when you were a big star.

AP: Most of my fans are dead (laughs).

WP: Who were some of your toughest opponents?

AP: Buddy Rogers, Pat O'Connor, Wilbur Snyder, Dick the Bruiser. I wrestled Sammartino once. Lou Thesz, Verne Gagne, all those people.

WP: Who was the toughest guy you got in the ring with?

AP The toughest guy I had to wrestle was "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers. He was strong, fast, clever. He didn't pull any punches. He was a tough guy.

WP: Who would you say was the best wrestler?

AP: One of the better wrestlers was Wilbur Snyder.

WP: I caught him on the tail end of his career. He didn't get the recognition. He was big in Chicago I know.

AP: Verne Gagne had the United States Heavyweight Championship belt. Snyder took it away from him and I took it away from Snyder in Cincinnati, Ohio and held it for a couple of years. Like you say, you didn't hear about it. But over there, we didn't hear about the people down south. We didn't even know if there were any wrestlers down there.

WP: Do you think wrestling can return to the regional promotions and be successful?

AP: I don't know. It's doing all right with the two big organizations - the one in Georgia and the WWF. I think Vince McMahon has done a tremendous job promotion wrestling. There's no questions about it. I hope everybody does well. If it's regional, I hope all the regionals do well. I always wish that everybody does well.

WP: Thank you, Angelo.

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